

## Was `Uzayr<sup>as</sup> Believed to be Son of God by the Jews?

The Jews claim that like Islam, Judaism is also a strictly monotheistic religion. The famous creed of Judaism says; *"Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one."* (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Jews insist that, unlike Christianity, there is no such concept of sonship to God Almighty. However, the Holy Qur`ān equates the Jews with the Christians having the same belief about the Prophet `Uzayr<sup>as</sup> (Ezra) as the Christians have about Jesus Christ<sup>as</sup>, i.e., 'son of God'.

"And the Jews say, 'Ezra is the son of Allāh,' and the Christians say, 'the Messiah is the son of Allāh;' that is what they say with their mouths. They only imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before them. Allāh's curse be on them! How they are turned away!" (9:30)

Ibn Hazm, a great Muslim scholar and exegete has attributed this belief to the Sadducee sect of the Jews, lived in Yemen. The Jewish and Christian scholars have denied the existence of any such Jewish group and have declared such interpretations as futile attempts to prove the Qur`ānic statement true and taking strong exception to this verse have critically termed it as a manifest error of the Holy Qur`ān. They contend that this belief has neither been mentioned in the Bible nor in any Jewish literature and no Jew adheres to such belief.

The study of the Bible, however, shows that the concept of sonship of God, if not literal but metaphorical, is found in it, as angels and many righteous men are referred to as 'sons of God'.

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them." (Job 1:6)

The Bible also referred to God's special relationship with the Israelites – His chosen people as God's son:

"And you shall say to Pharaoh: Thus says the Lord: 'Israel is My son. My first born'." (Exodus 4:22)

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son." (Hosea 11:1)

Prophet David<sup>as</sup> is also called son of God.

"I [David] will proclaim the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are my son; today I have become your Father'." (Psalms 2:7)

This sonship was passed on to Prophet Solomon<sup>as</sup> and, by implication, to all future successors of the House of David.

“Behold, a son shall be born to you [David]...His name shall be Solomon...He shall build a house for My Name; he shall be a son to me, and I will be a Father to him, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.” (Psalms 2:7)

As far as the sonship of Ezra is concerned, modern Jewish scholars vehemently denies it as part of Jewish faith. However, the study of Jewish literature reveals that Ezra holds a special, rather a unique, status amongst the other Israelite Prophets, including Moses. Though it is denied in Encyclopedia Judaica that the Jewish people consider Ezra as son of God, the author of the article under the title ‘Ezra’ mentions this unique position of Ezra among all other Prophets being “singled out”.

*“He was so zealous in spreading the Torah, that rabbis said of him, “If Moses had not anticipated him, Ezra would have received the Torah” (Tosef., Sanh. 4:7). He restored and reestablished the Torah that had been almost completely forgotten (Suk. 20a).”* (Encyclopedia Judaica Vol-6 P-1106 – Under Ezra – In the Aggadah)

*“In Islam: Muhammad claims (Sura 9:30) that in the opinion of the Jews, ‘Uzayr (Ezra) is the son of God. These words are an enigma because no such opinion is to be found among the Jews, even **though Ezra was singled out for special appreciation** (See Sanh. 21b; Yev. 86 b). The Muslim traditionalists attempt to explain the words of Muhammad with a Muslim legend, whose origin appears to stem from IV Ezra 14: 18-19. The people of Israel sinned, they were punished by God, the Holy Ark was removed and the Torah was forgotten. It was due, however, to Ezra’s merit that his heart was filled with the Torah of God, which he taught to the people of Israel.. When the Holy Ark was returned to them and they compared that which Ezra taught them with the text of the Sefer Torah in the Holy Ark, the words they found were identical. They deduced from this that Ezra was the son of Allah. Tabarī cites another version of this legend: the Jewish scholars themselves hid the Ark, after they were beaten by the Amalekites. H. Z. Hirschberg proposed another assumption, based on the words of Ibn Hazm (I, 99), namely, that the “righteous” who live in Yemen believe that ‘Uzayr was indeed the son of Allah. According to other Muslim sources, there were some Yemenite Jews who had converted to Islam who believed that Ezra was the messiah. For Muhammad, Ezra, the apostle (!) of the messiah, can be seen in the same light as the Christians saw Jesus, the messiah, the son of Allah. An allusion to the figure of Ezra as the apostle of the messiah is found in a tale which is widespread among the Jews of Yemen, according to which Ezra requested that they emigrated to Erez Israel, and because they did not, he cursed them. Yemenite Jews have, therefore, refrained from naming their children Ezra. According to some Muslim commentators, ‘Uzayr is the man who passed by the destroyed city (of Jerusalem; Sura 2:261) and did not believe that it could be rebuilt.” (P-1106, 1107)*

A famous translator of the Holy Qur`ān, George Sale, also denies this fact mentioned in the Holy Qur`ān and calling it a grievous charge against the Jews, yet feels some little weight in it and believes to have its roots in the fables of rabbins.

*“This grievous charge against the Jews, the commentators endeavour to support by telling us, that it is meant of some ancient heterodox Jews, or else of some Jews of Medina; who said so for no other reason, than for that the law being utterly lost and forgotten during the babylonish captivity, Ezra having been raised to life after he had been dead one hundred years, dictated the whole anew unto the scribes, out of his own memory; at which they greatly marveled, and declared that he could not have done it, unless he were the son of God. Al Beidāvi adds, that the imputation must be true, because this verse was read to the Jews and they did not contradict it; which they were ready enough to do in other instances.*

*That Ezra did thus restore not only the Pentateuch, but also the other books of the Old Testament, by divine revelation, was the opinion of several of the Christian fathers, who were quoted by Dr. Prideaux, and of some other writers; which they seem to have first borrowed from a passage in that very ancient apocryphal book, called in our English Bible, the second book of Esdras. Dr. Prideaux tells us, that herein the fathers attributed more to Ezra, than the Jews themselves, who suppose that he only collected and set forth a correct edition of the scriptures, which he labored much in, and went a great way in the perfecting of it. It is not improbable however, that the fiction came originally from the Jews, though they be now of another opinion, and I cannot fix it upon them by any direct proof. For, not to insist upon the testimony of the Mohammedans (which yet I cannot but think of some little weight in a point of this nature), it is allowed by the most sagacious critics, that the second book of Ezra was written by a Christian indeed, but yet one who had been bred a Jew, and was intimately acquainted with the fables of the Rabbins; and the story itself is perfectly in the taste and way of thinking of those men.”*  
(P-152 - THE KORAN by George Sale, Ninth Edition, Philadelphia and London J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY 1923)

Gordon Darnell Newby, an associate professor of history at North Carolina State University, did an unbiased research and proved that not only Ezra, but Enoch (Prophet Idress<sup>as</sup>), Baruch, teacher of Ezra, and Elijah were believed to have been translated to heavens alive, stripped off their humanity and ranked among the sons of God. He wrote:

*“Ezra is noted in the Bible as the leader of the expedition of return to Jerusalem from exile and the reestablishment of the Jewish state. For the rabbis, Ezra was the equivalent of Moses. Sanhedrin 21b contends that Ezra would have been the recipient of the Torah had it not already been given to Moses, but he was instead given the task of restoring the forgotten law. He is credited with the introduction of the proper means of writing the Torah, and for this activity he is given the title of Scribe. In extra-rabbinic literature, this appellation is given as “Scribe of the knowledge of the Most High”, a title usually given to one of several archangels, Elijah, and Enoch. Ezra was a disciple of Baruch, who was taken by God to heaven while alive, and Ezra himself was translated to heaven alive, which represents another point of correspondence with Elijah and Enoch. The equation*

*of Ezra the Scribe with Enoch the Scribe and their translations is most likely the solution to our problem.*

*Enoch was of the generation of the Flood, of those who transgressed. In the popular books of Enoch, he was taken to heaven so that he would not be destroyed when God abandoned the earth and as a sign of God's mercy that one pious man would be saved. When translated into heaven, he was stripped of his humanity and transformed into the powerful angel, Metatron, who was taught by God all the secrets, more than any other creature, indeed, and was given guardianship over the treasures of God and became a lesser God. In 3 Enoch 48C, verses 1-4 we read*

*Alep: The Holy One, blessed be he, said: I made him strong. I took him, I appointed him, namely Metatron my servant, who is unique among all the denizens of the heights.*

*Alep: "I made him strong" in the generation of the first man. When I saw that the men of the generation of the Flood were behaving corruptly, I came and removed my Shekinah from their midst, and I brought it up with the sound of the horn and with shouting to the height above, as it is written.*

*God went up to the sound of horn,*

*The Lord went up with a fanfare of trumpets.*

*Lamed: "I took him"—Enoch the son of Jared, from their midst, and brought him up with the sound of the trumpet and with shouting to the height, to be my witness, together with the four creatures of the chariot, to the world to come.*

*Peh: "I appointed him"—over all the storehouses and treasures which I have in every heaven, and I entrusted to him the keys of each of them. I set him as a prince over all the princes, and made him a minister of the throne of glory....I committed to him wisdom and understanding, so that he should behold the secrets of heaven above and earth beneath.*

*It is particularly interesting to find this material in 3 Enoch, because we can deduce that the inhabitants of the Hijāz during Muhammad's time knew portions, at least, of 3 Enoch in association with the Jews. The angels over which Metatron becomes chief are identified in the Enoch traditions as sons of God, the Bene Elohim, the Watchers, the fallen ones as the causers of the flood. In 1 Enoch, and 4 Ezra, the term "Son of God" can be applied to the Messiah, but most often it is applied to righteous men, of whom Jewish tradition holds there to be no more righteous than the ones God elected to translate to heaven alive. It is easy, then, to imagine that among the Jews of the Hijāz who were apparently involved in the mystical speculations associated with the merkābāh, Ezra, because of the traditions of his translation, because of his piety, and particularly because he was equated with Enoch as the Scribe of God, could be termed one of the Bene*

*Elohīm. And, of course, he would fit the description of a religious leader (one of the aḥbār of Quran 9:31.) whom the Jews had exalted.” (P: 60-61 - A History of the Jews of Arabia by Gordon Darnell Newby, published in Columbia, South Carolina, by the University of South Carolina Press, 1988 – First Edition).*

Yoram Erder of Tel Aviv University in his article, “*The Origin of the Name Idrīs in the Qur`ān: A Study of the Influence of Qumran Literature on Early Islam*” appeared in Journal of the Near Eastern Studies, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Oct., 1990), pp. 339-350, published by the University of Chicago Press, has confirmed this fact that there was a Jewish sect in Yemen which had such beliefs against the mainstream rabbinical Judaism. He wrote:

*“It is evident from the influence of the Enoch literature on the Yemenī Jews of that period, that they were far removed from the mainstream of rabbinical Judaism, which opposed this literature. According to Ibn Hazm, the Jews mentioned in the Qur`ān who believed that `Uzayr was the son of God were members of the Sadducee sect in Yemen. We know today that the Karaites referred to the Qumranic fragments in their possession as Sadducean literature perhaps because of the important role which the family of the Sadducean priests played there.*

*Based on the writings of Ibn Hazm, we can conclude that the Sadducean literature, i.e., Enoch literature, possessed by the Karaites in Babylonia and Persia from the eight century on, was also available to the Yemenī Jews in the seventh century.”*

Erminie Huntress wrote in the article, “SON OF GOD” IN JEWISH WRITINGS PRIOR TO THE CHRISTIAN ERA” appeared in the Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Jun., 1935), pp. 117-123 Published by: The Society of Biblical Literature, that after Jewish controversy with Christianity, Jewish scholars, particularly Targumists, (the scholars who narrate Hebrew Bible into Aramaic in prayer services) changed such phrases and terms about sonship of God.

*“The least important use of the term "sons of God" is its application to supernatural beings, reflecting the polytheistic notion of a group or family of gods, beings divine by nature who later became angels. This is illustrated in Gen. 6 2, 4, Job 1 6, 2 i, 38 7, Psalms 29 1 and 89 6, Psalm 82 (if the "sons of the Most High" are angels rather than human judges), Dan. 3 25. In the second century Noah fragment at the end of the book of Enoch (En. 106) there is a curious tale describing Noah's birth, in which he shows supernatural qualities and is suspected of being the son of a "son of God." In En. 69 4, 5 and 71 1 ff., passages on the angels (first century B. C. or A. D) Charles translates "sons of God," believing that to be the original reading; but the text has "sons of the angels." **The circumlocution suggests that this use of the phrase "sons of God" was beginning to seem objectionable. The same feeling may be reflected in some versions of Psalm 89 6 and 29 1, which change אֱלֹהִים [Elohim] to אֱלִים [Elim] "the mighty."** [Emphasis added] In Wisd. 5 5 (first century B. C.) Dr. Schmidt suggests that the sons of God here are the inhabitants of the celestial world, not only the human saints but the angels; this is*

*possible, but not to be proved. Hence we conclude that while such usage still existed in the second century B. C. there is no certain evidence of it in the first century B. C. or A. D. **The reaction against it may, then, have started even before the controversy with Christianity; it might well result simply from the logic of Judaism. The Targums rule out this use of the phrase completely.** [Emphasis added] It implied a participation by created beings in the nature of God, which the Jews came to consider impossible, all the more so since some of these angels had sinned."*

She further wrote about this change.

***The Targums usually change the wording of such Old Testament passages.** [Emphasis added] For example, the Targum renders Isa. 1 2 "a people whom I have called sons," and Jer. 31 sb "My word is to Israel like a father and Ephraim is dear before me." But although the Targums were undoubtedly taking shape as early as the first century, the final official versions now extant are of course from the third, fourth, or fifth centuries A. D. and show the effects of the conflict with Christianity. **The Targumists were concerned not only to repudiate the idea that the Messiah was to be the Son of God, but to deny that God could have a son at all.** [Emphasis added]*

The above references prove, beyond doubt that not only the concept of sonship of God, whether literal or figurative, was prevalent among the Jews but also some figures including Ezra were considered as sons of God. All the Praise belongs to Allāh Almighty.